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REVIEWS AND NOTICES

Caractères généraux des langues germaniques. By MEILLET. Paris: Librairie Hachette et C^{ie}, 1917. Pp. xvi+222.

When the distinguished author of a number of excellent works on the grammar of the Old Slavic, Armenian, Greek, and Old Persian languages presents us with a comprehensive discussion of the main currents in the development of the Germanic languages, philologists have good reason to look forward to the study of his book with eager anticipation. I, for one, commenced to read it with the most optimistic expectations and was inclined throughout to give respectful consideration to any and all theories advanced by a scholar of Meillet's splendid and well-deserved reputation. It is with a keen disappointment that I have to admit that the book, while at times brilliantly suggestive, is based upon an unsound hypothesis. On the other hand, I am glad to state that it has considerable merit: it displays a splendid store of well-organized knowledge and a masterful ability to organize the material; the style is of truly French lucidity, condensed, but withal almost conversational; and on the whole the book must be classed as one of the pioneer works in the tracing of tendencies in the growth of languages ("les tendances qui dirigent le développement, les principes actifs du changement").

Meillet adopts Feist's unproved and improbable hypothesis of the non-Indo-European origin of the Germanic people¹ and believes with him that the ancestors of the Germanic group originally spoke some unknown language, became Indo-Germanized by an invasion from the east, and accepted the language of their conquerors, retaining, however, their original habits of articulation: "Les matériaux avec lesquels est fait le germanique sont indo-européens; le plan de la langue est nouveau." It is the avowed purpose of Meillet's book to characterize "les innovations qui ont donné au group germanique un aspect spécial."

Now Feist's arguments, to be sure, are far from convincing; but neither have the representatives of the Baltic-home theory proved their case completely, though, in my opinion, they are much closer to it. There is no escape from the fact that at present any decision concerning the origin of the Indo-Europeans must be one of faith rather than of scientific proof. However, this need not be any impediment to Meillet's accepting Feist's view tentatively, as it were, as a working hypothesis, being temporarily satisfied with it if it "works out" in a pragmatic sense of the phrase—that is, if it offers

¹ Of Feist's various works on the subject, he mentions only *Indogermanen und Germanen* (Halle, 1913); he disregards entirely the investigations of contrary-minded scholars like Much, Hirt, Kossinna, Braungart.

acceptable explanations of hitherto obscure phenomena, and if it does not lead to insoluble contradictions. There can be no doubt of the justification of such a method in a book like Meillet's. All that can be demanded is this—that the *facts* be stated correctly and without any biased preference, and that the verdict of these facts be unflinchingly accepted by the investigator. How does Meillet meet these requirements?

The introduction, which keeps carefully aloof from all geographical theories concerning the home of the "Aryans," attempts to show on theoretical grounds that Germanic cannot be any direct continuation of Indo-European speech because its radical changes betray a lack of that stability which is characteristic of uniform races (p. 20). This theory as such might be debatable; but its application to Meillet's contention is precluded by the fact that the Germanic languages (notwithstanding the author's frequent assertions to that effect) are by no means farther removed from the parent-tongue than any contemporaneous Indo-European language; on the contrary, *in their tendencies of development* they are closer to it than any other, as I have attempted to show in a number of articles (especially *AJPh*, XXXIII, 195; *MPh*, XI, 71; *IF*, XXXIII, 377). It is interesting, by the way, that even Meillet makes this statement concerning the further growth of the Germanic languages after they had once deviated from the Indo-European: "Les lignes de ce développement présentent, on le verra, une remarquable continuité dans l'ensemble."

The concrete proof for the author's contention we must naturally expect to find chiefly in the chapter on phonology. As a matter of fact, the discussion of the Germanic sound-shift is by far the most important foundation of his hypothesis, and it is here that we begin to understand the affinity between Meillet's and Feist's views. Our author returns to a phonetically interesting explanation of the Armenian consonant shift ($p > ph$, $b > p$, etc.), given by him as early as 1903, in his *Esquisse d'une grammaire comparée de l'arménien classique* (pp. 6 f.): In a prehistoric Armenian pronunciation, IE b , d , g were imperfectly voiced; the vocal vibrations set in after the oral articulation had started. This led to their change into Arm. p , t , k , which, however, were not "pure tenues" as in Romance and Slavic languages, but *sourdes faibles*—voiceless lenes, apparently, as in South German. In the present book this theory is resuscitated on a broader scale. According to Meillet, the French articulation of p , t , k , with glottal occlusion, is the normal one in human speech. The Armenian articulation, with open glottis, is due to an ethnic substructure of pre-Indo-European Georgians. In principle, the same condition is claimed for the Germanic languages: In primitive Indo-European, p , t , k were pronounced with glottal stop ("by implosion"), while the vocal vibrations of b , d , g were exactly synchronized with the corresponding oral occlusion. This is the case in French and (according to Meillet) elsewhere in Romance and Slavic tongues. But the pre-Indo-European population south of the Baltic had the thoroughly abnormal way

of pronouncing *p*, *t*, *k* with the glottis open, and *b*, *d*, *g* with imperfectly synchronized vibrations, and they retained that habit when they adopted the Indo-European language (p. 40): "On conclura de là que la mutation consonantique est due au maintien de leurs habitudes d'articulation par les populations qui ont reçu et adopté le dialecte indo-européen appelé à devenir le germanique"). In the case of *p*, *t*, *k* this led to aspiration; aspirated *tenues* are articulated with less tension of the oral organs than pure *tenues* and therefore they became spirants in Germanic (p. 35: "Les occlusives sourdes aspirées sont en général plus faiblement articulées que les non aspirées correspondantes; elles perdent donc aisément leur occlusion"); taking this as the starting-point, we may easily imagine the rest of Meillet's description of the consonant shift; he considers the French type of stopped consonants "le plus stable, le plus durable," while the Germanic type tends to constant changes (p. 43: "le type articulatoire une fois posé en germanique commun s'est constamment reproduit en haut allemand, et il s'agit d'un développement continu").

Surely this is an attractive theory, but unfortunately it is flatly contradicted by dry facts such as these:

1. Glottal-stop *p*, *t*, *k* (implosive stops) are by no means "normal." Until recently it was even doubted whether they were very common in French; cf., e.g., Jespersen, *Lehrbuch*, p. 107, and *Grundfragen*, p. 124; Kirste, *Die konstitutionellen Verschiedenheiten der Verschlusslaute im Idg.*; Evans, *The Spelling Experimenter*, II, 20; Sweet, *Primer*³, p. 59, etc.). If the open glottis had anything to do with *Lautverschiebung*, this would be one of the most common sound-changes in existence.

2. Aspirated *tenues* are, generally speaking, pronounced with rather more than less muscle tension than pure *tenues*. Exceptions are granted, but they are so rare that they do not affect the case.

3. It is generally stated by phoneticians (e.g., Sievers, *Grundzüge*, p. 141; Sweet, *loc. cit.*) that the very languages that Meillet quotes as a parallel to Germanic, namely, Armenian and Georgian, happen to be two of the very few that articulate *p*, *t*, *k* with glottal stop. "Die Verbreitung dieser Laute scheint gering zu sein. Bisher habe ich sie mit Sicherheit selbst nur im Armenischen . . . und Georgischen beobachten können" (Sievers, *loc. cit.*). Meillet himself admits, *Armenisches Elementarbuch* (1913), p. 11: "Man besitzt kein Mittel, die Aussprache von arm. *p*, *t*, *k* und *b*, *d*, *g* näher zu bestimmen"; and it matters little if he adds (without any argument): "es waren aber gewiss keine Verschlusslaute der romanischen oder slavischen Typen." This is characteristic of the weakness of the foundation upon which Meillet builds his structure of a non-Indo-European, pre-Germanic language.

4. There is no shadow of an argument that the IE articulations were as Meillet describes them. Even if they could be proved to have been thus, his phonetic deductions would be assailable; but all he offers is a plain assertion.

These objections pertain to the general principle of Meillet's contention. But in details, too, his deductions are contaminated by a number of regrettable misstatements from which I will quote only a few of the most typical:

On p. 45 he claims that intervocalic consonants possess the inherent tendency of approaching the vowel type more or less; voiceless consonants become voiced, occlusives become spirants. This is (partly) true for Romance, but untrue for Germanic; the two instances given by Meillet do not prove his point: in Danish **giutan > gyde* we have merely a change from fortis to lenis, and the OHG change from *-p-, -t-* to *ff, 33* is not an approach to the vowel type, but a strengthening of articulation (cf. *JEGPh*, XVI, 1 ff.). Closely connected with this misunderstanding is Meillet's statement that IE *bh, dh, gh* (having "une action glottale spéciale du type sonore, dont la nature n'est pas exactement connue") became in Germanic *b, d, g*, undergoing a secondary change to *ḃ, ḋ, ȝ* in intervocalic position. This view, aside from making the development of High German dialects entirely unintelligible (cf. writer, *JEGPh*, XVI, 11 ff.), slightly thwarts Meillet's representation of Verner's law, in which, by the way, I missed with regret any allusion to Gauthiot's explanation of this sound change in *Mém. soc. ling.*, XI, 193, the best that has ever been given—a curious omission in a book which is inscribed: "A la mémoire de mes anciens élèves germanistes—morts pour leur pays—Achille Burgun, Robert Gauthiot."—On p. 45 Meillet establishes a third consonant shift in South German on the ground of aspirated stops in *Korn, Tochter*; but *kh* in *Korn* is a retention of the general West-Germanic aspirate (in part, even a back-development from Upper German *kχ*), and *t* in *Tochter* is not an aspirate in South German pronunciation. Danish *b, d, g*, are not only "moins complètement sonores que les sonores romanes et slaves," but are entirely voiceless. The North German stops have not, since Germanic times, developed into any resemblance to the French stops; they have virtually retained the Germanic type of the "intermediate period" (the time between the two sound-shifts) and are as sharply distinct as ever from the corresponding French sounds. From the agreement of Goth. *atta* with Lat. and Gr. *atta*, Meillet concludes that geminates were not affected by the first sound-shift, for "les occlusives sourdes géminées, fortes par nature, se prononçaient sans doute (!) avec fermeture de la glotte dès le moment de l'implosion," while *tt* in composition (Goth. **wait-pu, *wait-tu > waist*) shows a different treatment—a far-fetched and altogether erroneous argument for his theory.

It is most distasteful to me to dwell on these details, but they are more than mere oversights (such as the Gc. preterit forms **geba, *gebi*, with *e* instead of *a*, p. 46; Goth. *daupus*, p. 53, for the adjective *daups*; the assertions that Gc. *γ^w* always changes to *w*, and that Gc. *p-* became *pf-* everywhere in OHG, etc.); the points that I had to criticize belong to the very substance of Meillet's theory, which stands and falls with them.

There is little to be said concerning Meillet's treatment of the vowels. From the point of view of linguistic tendencies it might not have been amiss to point out the characteristic meaning of the fact that IE \bar{a} was strengthened to $\bar{o} > uo > \bar{u}$ in German, while \bar{o} was weakened to \bar{a} , Slavic showing the opposite development. It is in keeping with Meillet's views that he attributes to IE a purely melodic accent, which did not exert any influence whatever on vowel quality and quantity. We have here a striking instance of Meillet's prejudice. According to him, whatever is found in Germanic cannot be Indo-European; now, in Germanic the accent influences the vowels to a great extent; consequently Meillet believes that it cannot have been thus in IE. Under these circumstances we cannot expect from him any explanation of the problem of *Ablaut*; it would have been inconsistent for him to admit that contrasts like $\tilde{e}:\tilde{o}:O$, $\tilde{e}:\tilde{o}:\bar{a}$ could have been caused by the accent. Throughout the chapter on phonology we are confronted again and again with the author's (semiconscious or unconscious?) effort to depict the Germanic languages as a deterioration of IE speech. The reader feels himself carried back to the times when Schleicher used to bewail the degradation of great and noble Gothic *habaidedum* to short and ugly English *had*.

The chapter on morphology shows the same tendency. Nevertheless Meillet's discussion of the Germanic verb is instructive and in some ways admirable; indeed, it is the best part of the book. Meillet aptly characterizes the Germanic verbal system as an entirely new structure brought about chiefly by two factors: the growing preponderance of *Ablaut* and the substitution of the element of tense for the element of aspect. The stress that he lays on the preservation of aorist forms in the Gc. preterit is especially interesting. He says on p. 145: "Etant donné que l'aoriste thématique s'est maintenu jusqu'en germanique commun, des aoristes athématiques ont pu se conserver aussi. Une flexion got. *bitum*, *bitub*, *bitun*, peut se rattacher aussi bien à l'aoriste athématique védique *bhēt* 'il a fendu', participe *bhidán*, qu'à un ancien parfait sans redoublement. Et un mélange de parfaits et d'aoristes athématiques au pluriel expliquerait le sens de prétérit pris en règle générale par le parfait en germanique." (I believe that Meillet with perfect safety could have gone a step farther, asserting that the Germanic strong preterit is essentially an aorist, combined with a few modified perfect forms. I stated this view in 1913 in a paper read before the Modern Language Association and briefly outlined it in my *Sounds and History of the German Language* [1916], pp. 153 ff; the publication of an article on this problem, written nearly three years ago, has been delayed by the war.)

The rest of the book is rather indifferent. It contains a very brief, non-committal discussion of Germanic declension, word order, and vocabulary. Strangely, no word is said about the development of gender, although this plays such an important part in the consolidation of the Germanic (especially German) declensional classes. In the chapter on vocabulary I was glad not to find any reference to Feist's erroneous statement (*PBB*, XXXVII, 112 ff.)

that the Germanic language contained an extremely large number (about one-third) of non-Indo-European words. If true, this would considerably strengthen Meillet's theory; does his silence indicate a recognition of the fallacy of Feist's claim?

In conclusion, the author repeats his assertion that the Germanic languages are fundamentally different from Indo-European. Especially in English, he says, hardly any trace of the IE type has remained: "A l'indo-européen, l'anglais est lié par une continuité historique; mais il n'a presque rien gardé du fonds indo-européen." Meillet is right; the difference is enormous; so is the difference between the acorn and the oak, the source and the delta of a mighty river. But essentially they are the same. The most important differences between Indo-European and Germanic are not deviations, but natural developments. The nucleus of practically every one of them can be found in the parent-tongue. It has not degenerated, but grown as a tree grows, reflecting in its changes the character and history of the most immediate descendants from the prehistoric Indo-European race.

Meillet has not carried his point. The failure of his arguments lends indirect support to the opposite view.

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